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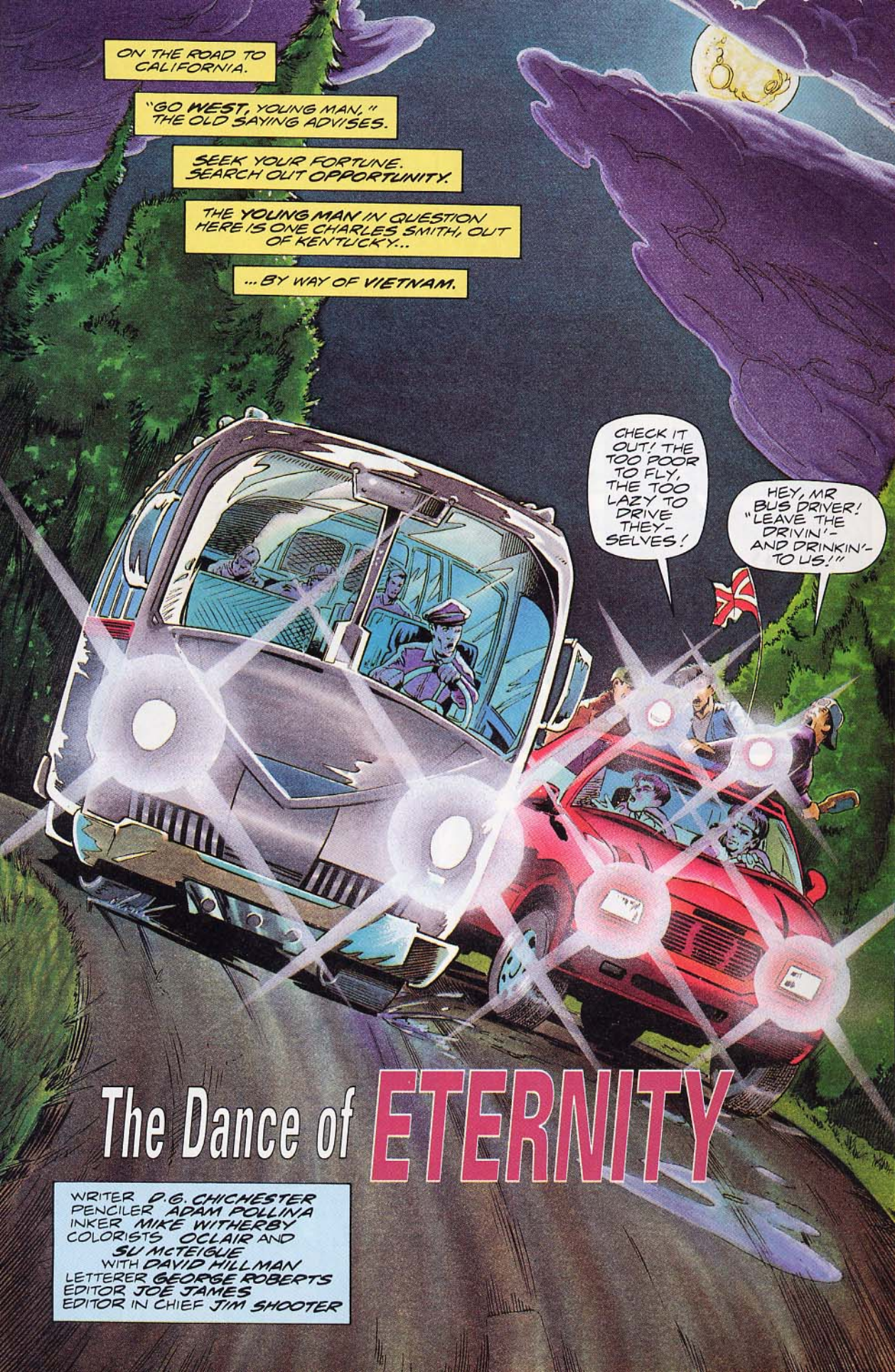
ON THE ROAD TO CALIFORNIA.
"GO WEST, YOUNG MAN," THE OLD SAYING ADVISES.
SEEK YOUR FORTUNE. SEARCH OUT OPPORTUNITY.
THE YOUNG MAN IN QUESTION HERE IS ONE CHARLES SMITH, OUT OF KENTUCKY...
...BY WAY OF VIETNAM.
CHECK IT OUT! THE TOO POOR TO FLY, THE TOO LAZY TO DRIVE THEY-SELVES!
HEY, MR BUS DRIVER! "LEAVE THE DRIVIN'- AND DRINKIN'- TO US!"

The Dance of ETERNITY

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WHEN HE WAS 12, CHARLES WENT SEARCHING FOR HIS BROTHER PETE, M.I.A., PRESUMED DEAD.
CHARLES DID THE IMPOSSIBLE. HE FOUND PETE ALIVE... BUT THEN LOST HIM IN THE SAME BREATH.
NOW IT'S TIME TO START BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN 18 YEARS AGO AND NOW.
HEY- WATCH IT!
BEGINNING WITH PETE'S HIGH SCHOOL SWEETHEART SUSIE CONTRELL.
DRIVER! YO- YOU BEHIND THE WHEEL!
WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO ABOUT THAT?
'BOUT WHAT?
THE GUYS IN THAT TRUCK! THEY'RE TROUBLE FOR THEMSELVES AND EVERYONE ON THE ROAD!
HEY, MAN! I GOT A SCHEDULE TO KEEP..
...THEY'RE NOT MY PROBLEM
HARRY! TURN THE WHEEL! TURN-
YEA! EXTRA POINTS FOR OLD FOLKS!
GET ON THE RADIO! STOP THE BUS!
I AIN'T STOPPIN NOTHIN'! CRAZY IDIOTS LIKE THAT'LL TURN RIGHT AROUND AND--
--THAT COULDA BEEN US! THAT WHAT YOU WANT?

IT'S NOT US, THOUGH.
AND WHILE I'M AROUND, IT'S NO ONE ELSE, EITHER!

CRAZY SONUVA--!
W-WHO'S CRAZIER? HIM FOR JUMPIN'... OR ME FOR SEEIN' IT?

18 YEARS AGO, CHARLES SMITH LOST HIS LEGS IN A JUNGLE FIREFIGHT.
HE DOESN'T UNDERSTAND WHAT'S GIVEN HIM THIS NEW PHYSIQUE.

WHOA! HOT STUFF!
MAYBE THIS ISN'T THE BEST WAY IN...
BUT HE KNOWS THE THINGS IT ALLOWS HIM TO DO.

POWERFUL, EVEN MIRACULOUS ACTIONS...
...IF ONLY HE BELIEVES.
CHARLES' HAND CLENCHES HIS BROTHER'S DOGTAGS. THE BOY INSIDE THE MAN REMEMBERING WHAT DROVE HIM THEN.

IT DRIVES HIM STILL.
NO TIME FOR ANYTHING FANCY.
THERE'S NO HINT OF HESITATION NOW.
YOU GUYS NEED A HAND?
W-WHAT IS THIS? WE BEEN SAVED BY A COMEDIAN? YOU THINK THAT'S FUNNY?
DON'T LISTEN TO HIM, YOUNG MAN! HARRY ALWAYS GETS A WISE LIP ON HIM WHEN HE'S NERVOUS!
EVEN MORE SO WHEN I SEE CONAN JUNIOR HERE RIPPING THE CAMPER APART WITH HIS BARE HANDS! HOW'D YOU DO THAT?
WISH I COULD TELL YOU!
I SHOULD THANK YOU! ALWAYS HATED THAT THING! IF IT HADN'T COOKED WE MIGHT'VE BEEN ABLE TO FIX IT!
GOOD RIDDANCE!
OH, WE'LL GET ANOTHER ONE!
PUT ME OUT OF MY MISERY NOW!

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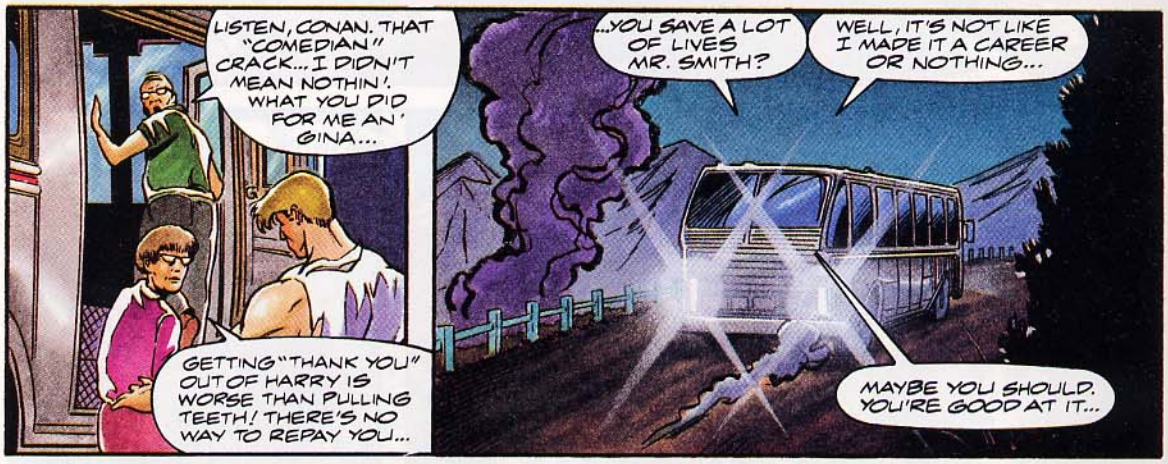
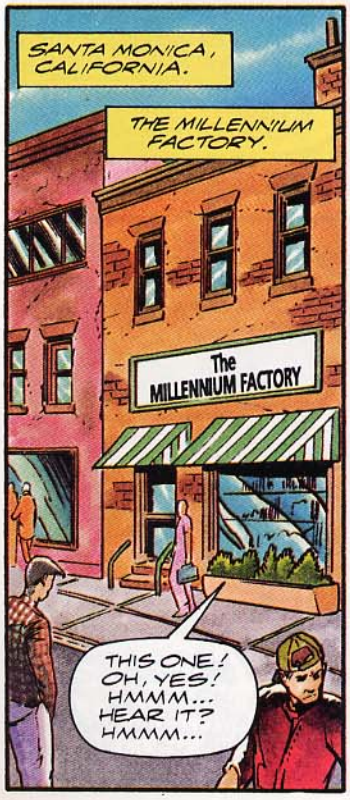
YOU GOT A FIRST AID KIT?
Y-YEAH! C-COMIN' AT YOU!
I'D RATHER TAKE MY CHANCES WITH THEM COMIN' BACK THAN HAVE YOU COMIN' AFTER ME!
DIDN'T YOU HAVE A SCHEDULE? WEREN'T YOU WORRIED ABOUT THOSE "CRAZY IDIOTS" IN THE TRUCK


LISTEN, CONAN. THAT "COMEDIAN" CRACK... I DIDN'T MEAN NOTHIN'. WHAT YOU DID FOR ME AN' GINA...
GETTING "THANK YOU" OUT OF HARRY IS WORSE THAN PULLING TEETH! THERE'S NO WAY TO REPAY YOU...
...YOU SAVE A LOT OF LIVES MR. SMITH?
WELL, IT'S NOT LIKE I MADE IT A CAREER OR NOTHING...
MAYBE YOU SHOULD. YOU'RE GOOD AT IT...


SANTA MONICA, CALIFORNIA.
THE MILLENNIUM FACTORY.
The MILLENNIUM FACTORY
THIS ONE! OH, YES! HMMM... HEAR IT? HMMM...

"NEW AGE" GOODS AND SERVICES.
...YOU CAN ALMOST TASTE THE HARMONIC ENERGIES RESONATING OFF IT!
I THOUGHT IT WAS MORE LIKE GARLIC.
MINTY, RIGHT?
UH, I MEANT MINTY GARLIC! LET ME KNOW IF I CAN SHOW YOU ANYTHING ELSE.

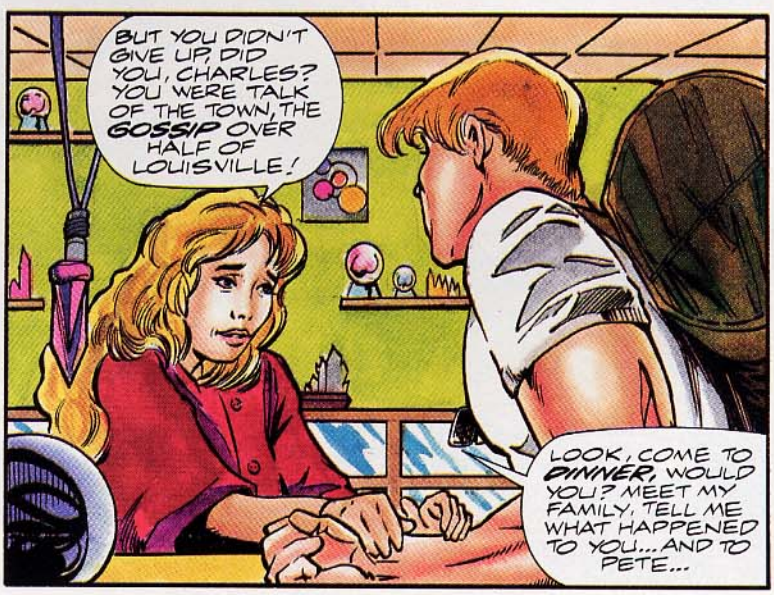
CAN I HELP YOU FIND SOMETHING?
THESE "ESP" CARDS? DO THEY WORK?

HONESTLY? WELL, DON'T TELL THE OTHER CUSTOMERS... BUT BEATS ME!
I ALWAYS PICK THE SAME ONE... I FIGURE THAT'S A GOOD AVERAGE.

IS IT THIS ONE?
HEY...YOU GOT IT IN ONE! YOU CLAIRVOYANT?

NO...I'M CHARLES SMITH. YOU USED TO BE SUSIE CONTRELL, RIGHT?
LITTLE CHARLES...? PETE'S BROTHER?
THIS IS AMAZING! I HAVEN'T THOUGHT ABOUT PETE IN--

--I HAVEN'T THOUGHT ABOUT PETE ANY-WHERE NEAR ENOUGH.
AFTER THEY GAVE HIM UP FOR DEAD, IT JUST HURT TOO MUCH.


BUT YOU DIDN'T GIVE UP, DID YOU, CHARLES? YOU WERE TALK OF THE TOWN, THE GOSSIP OVER HALF OF LOUISVILLE!
LOOK, COME TO DINNER, WOULD YOU? MEET MY FAMILY, TELL ME WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU... AND TO PETE...

THAT NIGHT. THE CONTRELL RESIDENCE.

JACK AND I'VE BEEN MARRIED 15 YEARS NOW...

SIXTEEN.

WE STAYED IN LOUISVILLE FOR ANOTHER TWO YEARS, BUT MOVED WEST RIGHT AFTER CASEY WAS BORN AND...

BUT I'M A VERY *MATURE* 13! THAT'S WHAT MRS. DELRIO SAYS... SHE'S MY CREATIVE WRITING TEACHER AND--

CASEY, STOP *FLIRTING* WITH MR. SMITH.

MOM!

IT'S CHARLES, REALLY! "MR. SMITH" IS JUST TOO... *ADULT!*

IMAGINE HOW I FEEL! LAST TIME I SAW YOU, YOU WERE BUMPING YOUR HEAD ON A TABLE THIS SIZE...

...NOW YOU LOOK LIKE YOU LIFT TEN OF 'EM OVERHEAD TO GET YOUR DAY STARTED!

SAM BILLUP, HE'S IN MY GYM CLASS, HE THINKS HE'S GOT *MUSCLES*? BUT IF HE SAW YOU...

CASEY, ENOUGH!

I COULD NEVER GET OVER HOW *CLOSE* YOU AND PETE WERE, CHARLES! JACK, YOU HAD TO SEE THE TWO OF THEM--

--I MEAN, SOME OLDER *BROTHERS* CAN'T STAND THE YOUNGER ONES! PETE, THOUGH, HE'D WANT CHARLES IN ON EVERYTHING!

TRYING TO GET PETE *ALONE* TO HAVE TIME FOR JUST THE TWO OF US WAS--

OH, DO GO ON, WIFE OF MINE. PLEASE. I'M SURE OUR *DAUGHTER*...

RIGHT. WELL, THAT WAS ALMOST 20 *YEARS* AGO AND--

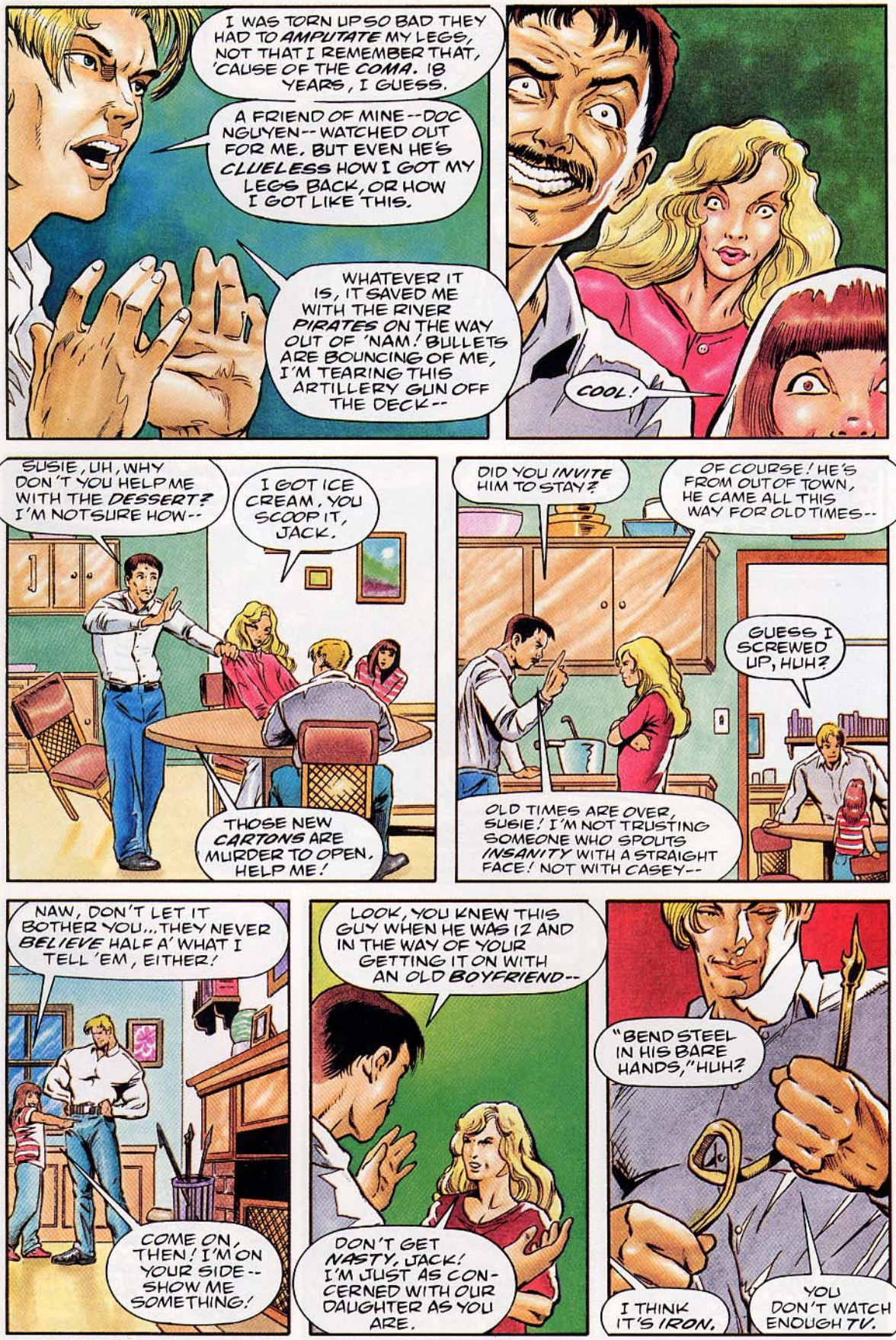
--AND WITH WHAT HAPPENED TO PETE IN VIETNAM--

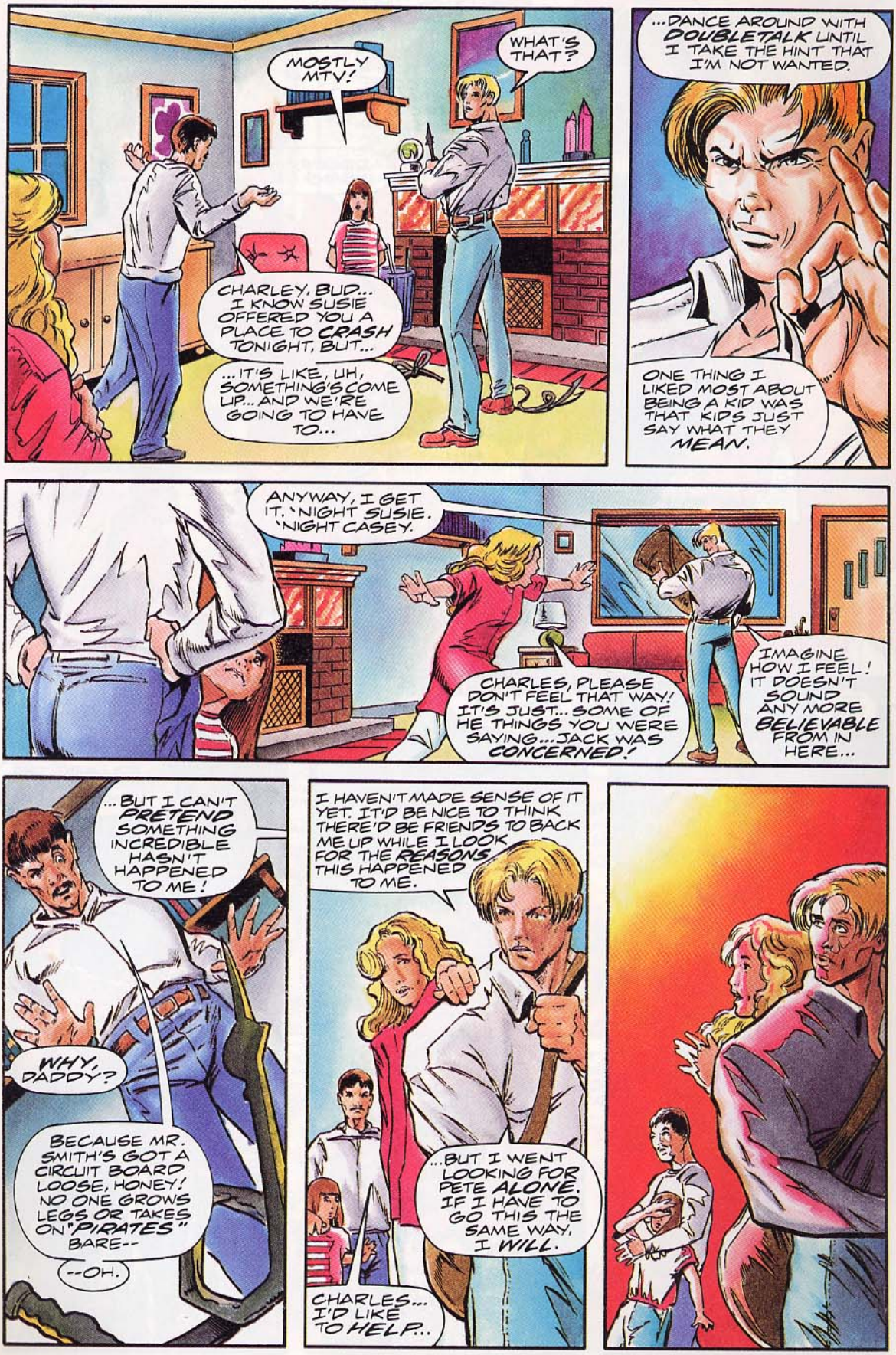
--WHAT DID *HAPPEN*, CHARLES? EVERYONE KNOWS YOU'D RUN AWAY TO LOOK FOR HIM...

I BET NO ONE THOUGHT *I'D* COME BACK, EITHER!

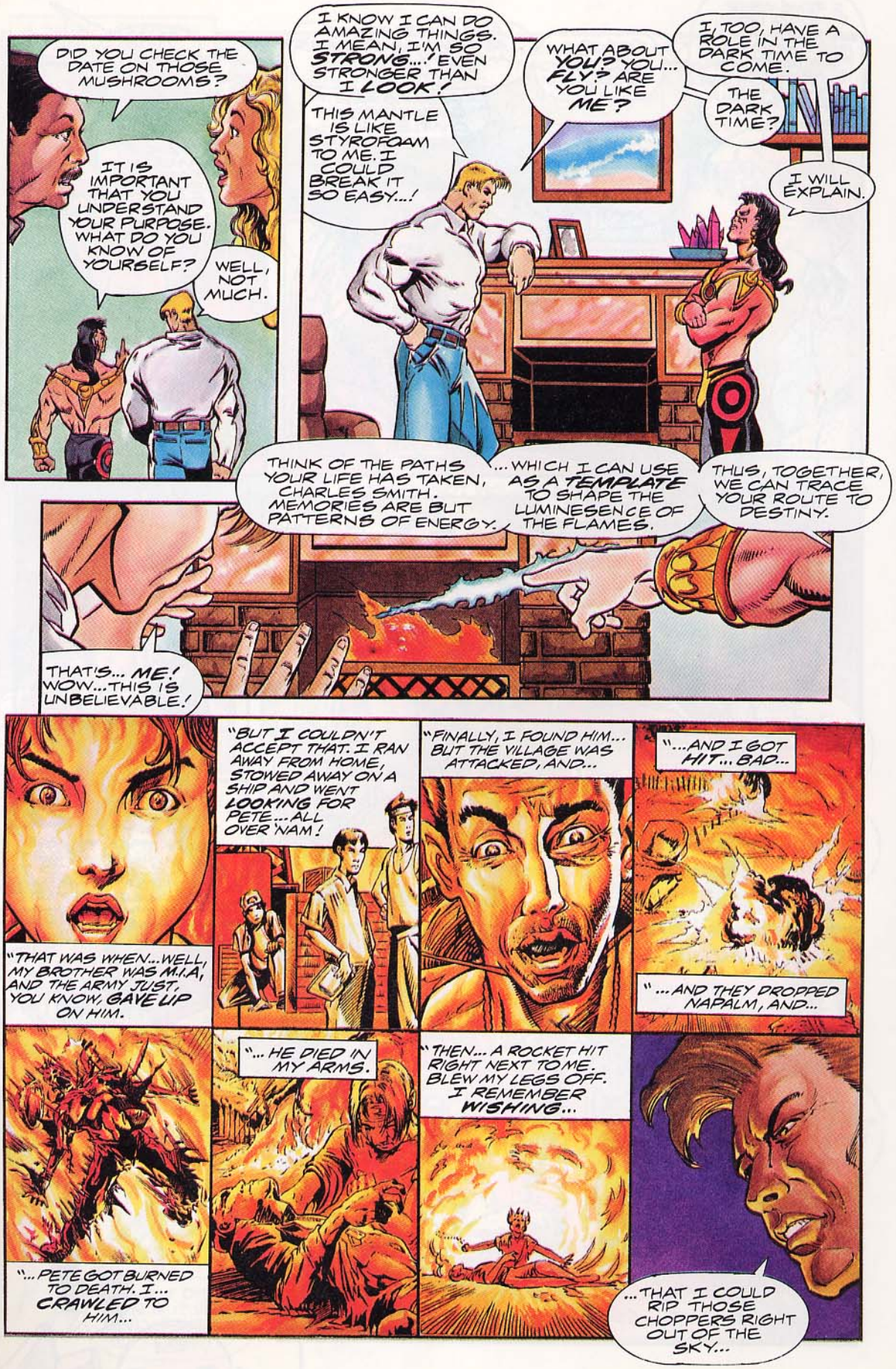
I FOUND HIM, SUSIE. *ALIVE*. JUST IN TIME TO WATCH HIM *DIE*.

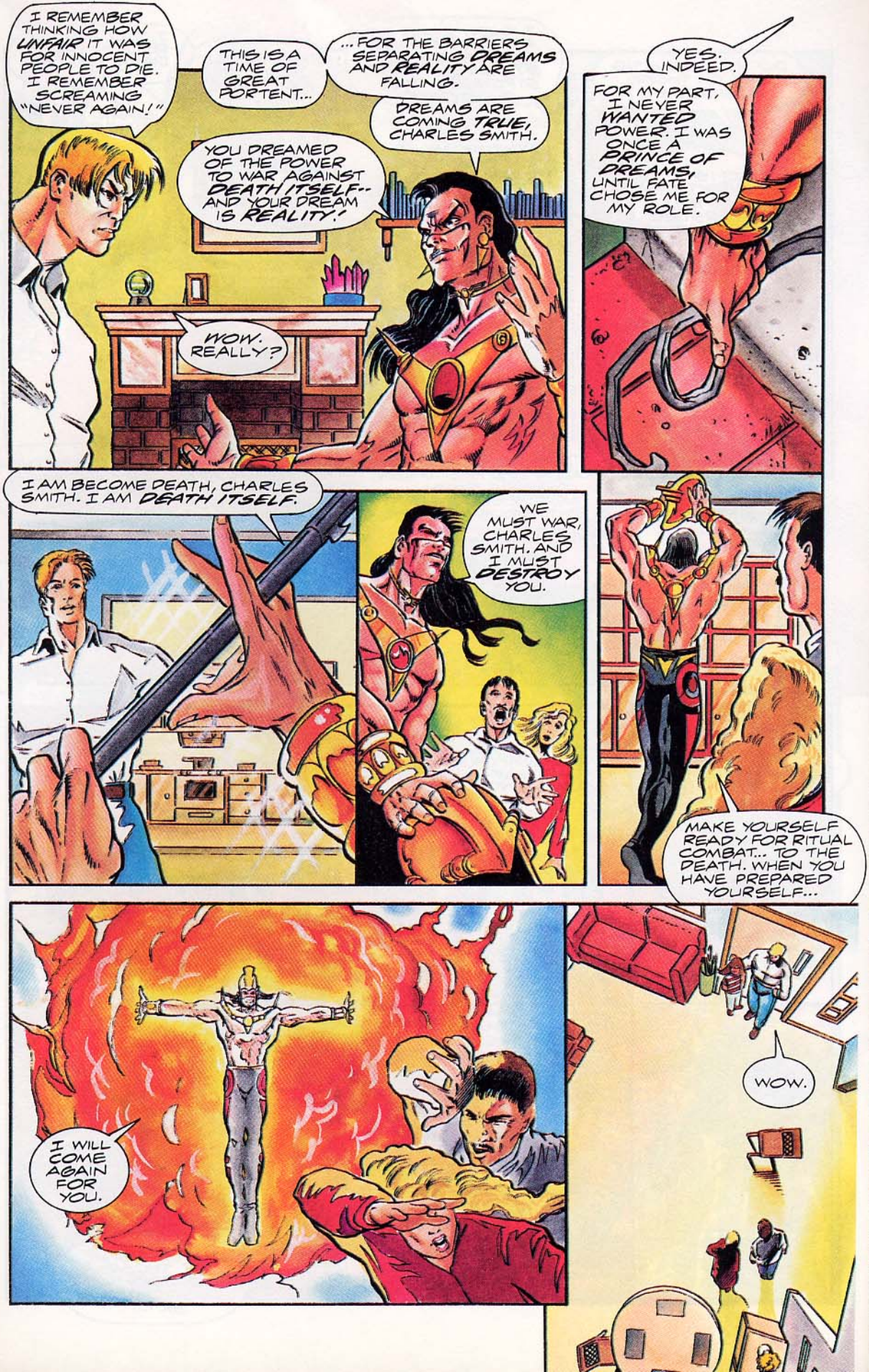
THE *GUNSHIPS* CAME IN SO FAST, WE BARELY HAD TIME TO...

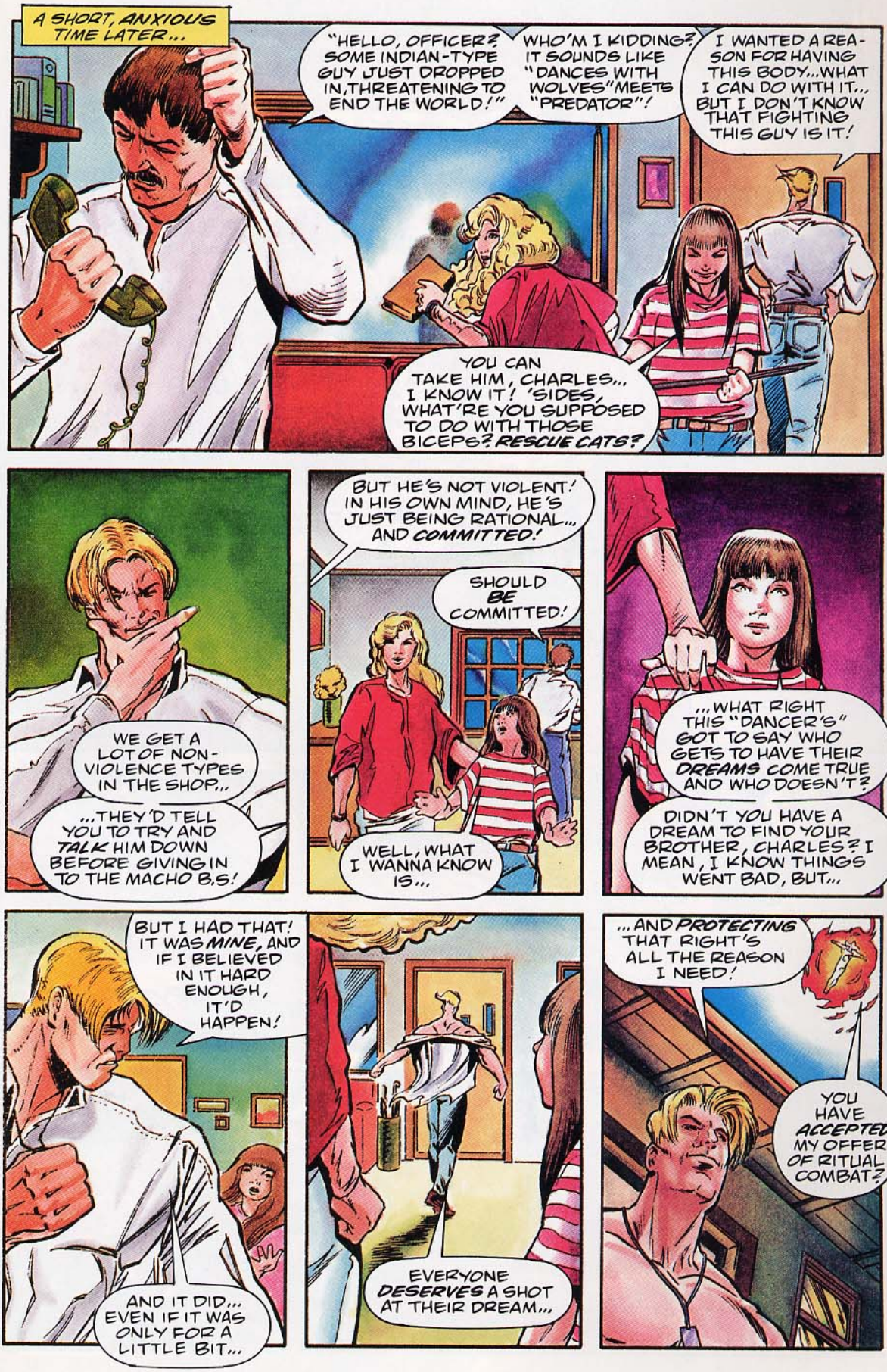

I WAS TORN UP SO BAD THEY HAD TO AMPUTATE MY LEGS, NOT THAT I REMEMBER THAT, 'CAUSE OF THE COMA. 18 YEARS, I GUESS.
A FRIEND OF MINE--DOC NGUYEN--WATCHED OUT FOR ME. BUT EVEN HE'S CLUELESS HOW I GOT MY LEGS BACK, OR HOW I GOT LIKE THIS.
WHATEVER IT IS, IT SAVED ME WITH THE RIVER PIRATES ON THE WAY OUT OF 'NAM! BULLETS ARE BOUNCING OFF ME, I'M TEARING THIS ARTILLERY GUN OFF THE DECK--
COOL!
SUSIE, UH, WHY DON'T YOU HELP ME WITH THE DESSERT? I'M NOT SURE HOW--
I GOT ICE CREAM, YOU SCOOP IT, JACK.
THOSE NEW CARTONS ARE MURDER TO OPEN. HELP ME!
DID YOU INVITE HIM TO STAY?
OF COURSE! HE'S FROM OUT OF TOWN, HE CAME ALL THIS WAY FOR OLD TIMES--
GUESS I SCREWED UP, HUH?
OLD TIMES ARE OVER, SUSIE! I'M NOT TRUSTING SOMEONE WHO SPOUTS INSANITY WITH A STRAIGHT FACE! NOT WITH CASEY--
NAW, DON'T LET IT BOTHER YOU... THEY NEVER BELIEVE HALF A' WHAT I TELL 'EM, EITHER!
COME ON, THEN! I'M ON YOUR SIDE--SHOW ME SOMETHING!
LOOK, YOU KNEW THIS GUY WHEN HE WAS 12 AND IN THE WAY OF YOUR GETTING IT ON WITH AN OLD BOYFRIEND--
DON'T GET NASTY, JACK! I'M JUST AS CONCERNED WITH OUR DAUGHTER AS YOU ARE.
"BEND STEEL IN HIS BARE HANDS," HUH?
I THINK IT'S IRON.
YOU DON'T WATCH ENOUGH TV.


MOSTLY MTV!
WHAT'S THAT?
CHARLEY, BUD... I KNOW SUSIE OFFERED YOU A PLACE TO CRASH TONIGHT, BUT...
...IT'S LIKE, UH, SOMETHING'S COME UP... AND WE'RE GOING TO HAVE TO...
...DANCE AROUND WITH DOUBLETALK UNTIL I TAKE THE HINT THAT I'M NOT WANTED.
ONE THING I LIKED MOST ABOUT BEING A KID WAS THAT KIDS JUST SAY WHAT THEY MEAN.
ANYWAY, I GET IT. 'NIGHT SUSIE. 'NIGHT CASEY.
CHARLES, PLEASE DON'T FEEL THAT WAY! IT'S JUST... SOME OF HE THINGS YOU WERE SAYING... JACK WAS CONCERNED!
IMAGINE HOW I FEEL! IT DOESN'T SOUND ANY MORE BELIEVABLE FROM IN HERE...
...BUT I CAN'T PRETEND SOMETHING INCREDIBLE HASN'T HAPPENED TO ME!
WHY, DADDY?
BECAUSE MR. SMITH'S GOT A CIRCUIT BOARD LOOSE, HONEY! NO ONE GROWS LEGS OR TAKES ON "PIRATES" BARE--
--OH.
I HAVEN'T MADE SENSE OF IT YET. IT'D BE NICE TO THINK THERE'D BE FRIENDS TO BACK ME UP WHILE I LOOK FOR THE REASONS THIS HAPPENED TO ME.
...BUT I WENT LOOKING FOR PETE ALONE. IF I HAVE TO GO THIS THE SAME WAY, I WILL.
CHARLES... I'D LIKE TO HELP...

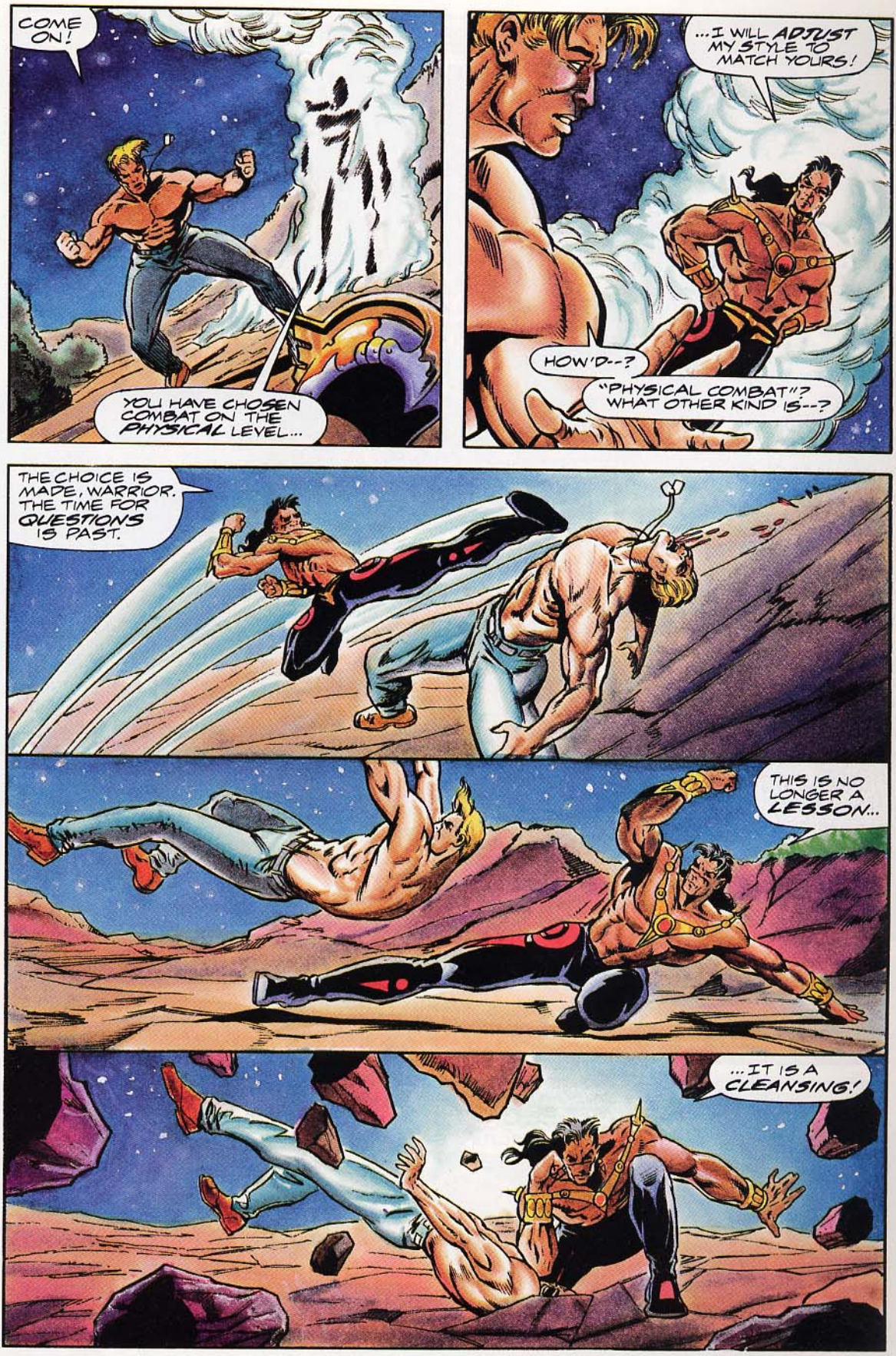
I HAVE COME FOR YOU, YOUNG WARRIOR.
I GUESS HE MEANS ME.
GOOD LORD!
YES.
BE CALM.
WHAT IS YOUR NAME, YOUTH?
CHARLES SMITH. WHAT'S YOURS?
I AM THE DANCER.
YOU DREAMED OF POWER ENOUGH TO STAY THE HAND OF DEATH, CHARLES SMITH, AND SO FATE CHOSE YOU...
...TO PLAY A PRINCIPAL ROLE IN THE DARK TIME TO COME.
YOU ARE THE CHAMPION OF HUMANKIND.
I AM?

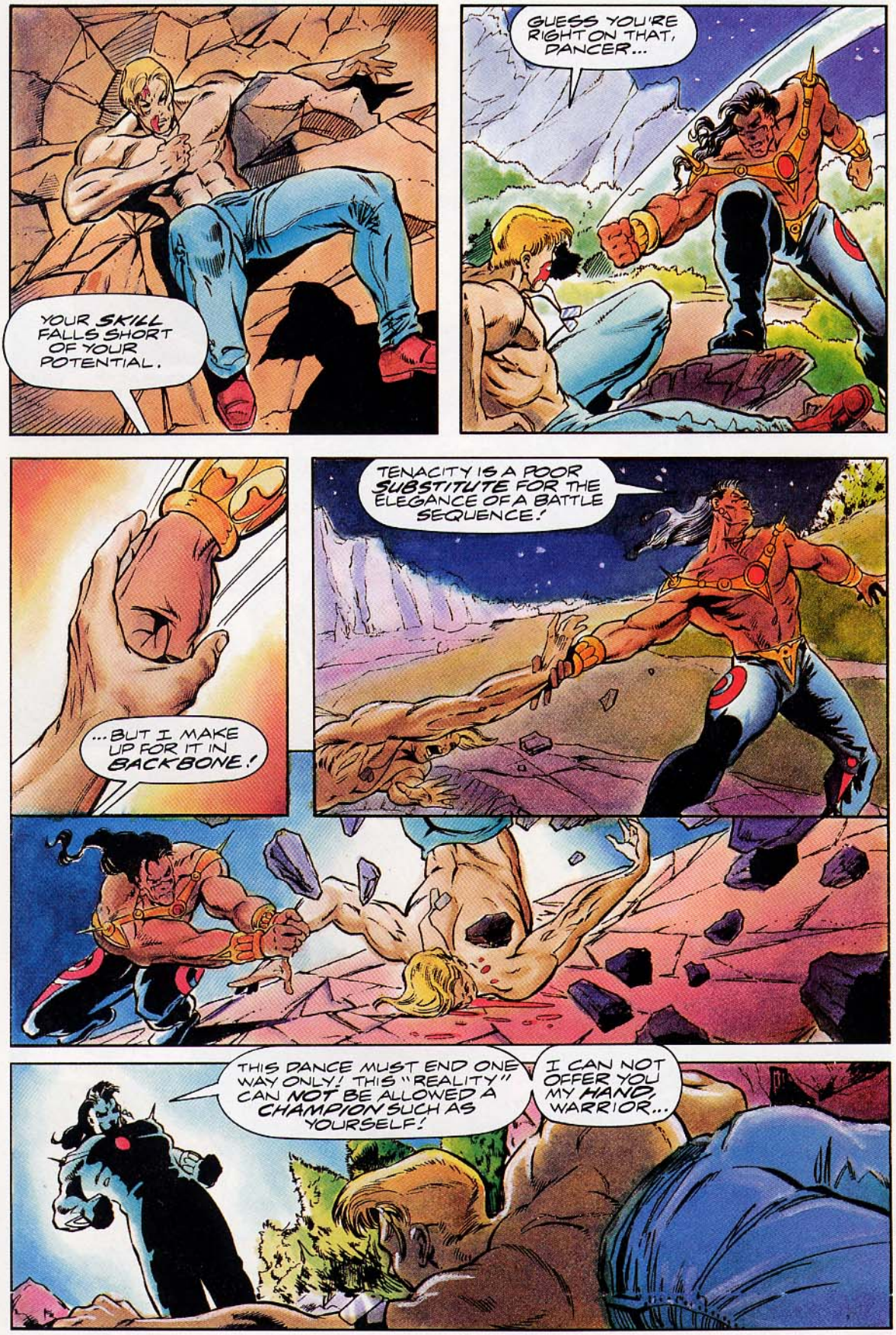

DID YOU CHECK THE DATE ON THOSE MUSHROOMS?
IT IS IMPORTANT THAT YOU UNDERSTAND YOUR PURPOSE. WHAT DO YOU KNOW OF YOURSELF?
WELL, NOT MUCH.
I KNOW I CAN DO AMAZING THINGS. I MEAN, I'M SO STRONG...! EVEN STRONGER THAN I LOOK!
THIS MANTLE IS LIKE STYROFOAM TO ME. I COULD BREAK IT SO EASY...!
WHAT ABOUT YOU? YOU... FLY? ARE YOU LIKE ME?
I, TOO, HAVE A ROLE IN THE DARK TIME TO COME.
THE DARK TIME?
I WILL EXPLAIN.
THINK OF THE PATHS YOUR LIFE HAS TAKEN, CHARLES SMITH. MEMORIES ARE BUT PATTERNS OF ENERGY.
...WHICH I CAN USE AS A TEMPLATE TO SHAPE THE LUMINESENCE OF THE FLAMES.
THUS, TOGETHER, WE CAN TRACE YOUR ROUTE TO DESTINY.
THAT'S... ME! WOW...THIS IS UNBELIEVABLE!
"THAT WAS WHEN...WELL, MY BROTHER WAS M.I.A. AND THE ARMY JUST, YOU KNOW, GAVE UP ON HIM.
"BUT I COULDN'T ACCEPT THAT. I RAN AWAY FROM HOME, STOWED AWAY ON A SHIP AND WENT LOOKING FOR PETE...ALL OVER 'NAM!
"FINALLY, I FOUND HIM... BUT THE VILLAGE WAS ATTACKED, AND...
"...AND I GOT HIT... BAD...
"...AND THEY DROPPED NAPALM, AND...
"...PETE GOT BURNED TO DEATH. I... CRAWLED TO HIM...
"...HE DIED IN MY ARMS.
"THEN... A ROCKET HIT RIGHT NEXT TO ME. BLEW MY LEGS OFF. I REMEMBER WISHING...
...THAT I COULD RIP THOSE CHOPPERS RIGHT OUT OF THE SKY...

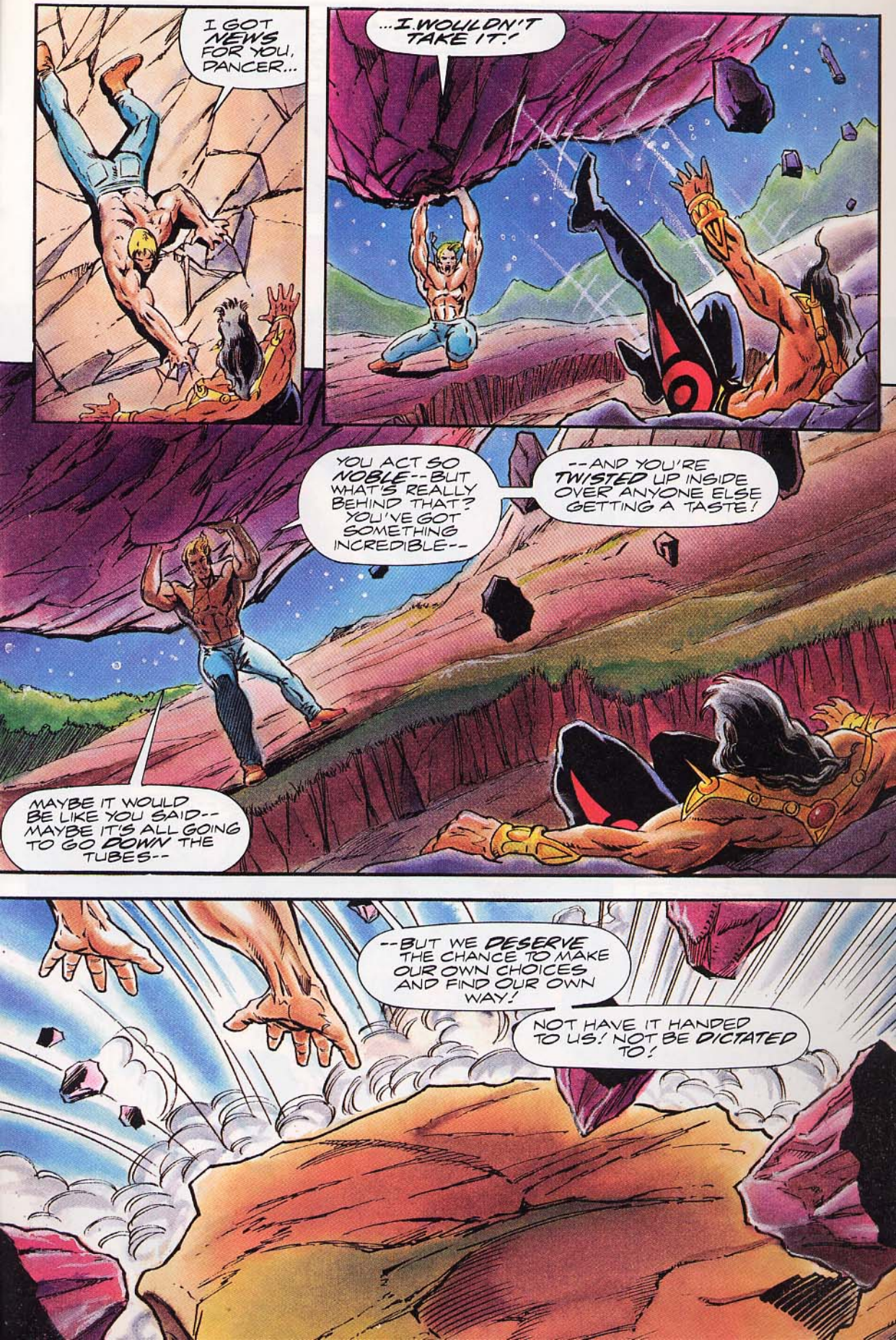

I REMEMBER THINKING HOW UNFAIR IT WAS FOR INNOCENT PEOPLE TO DIE. I REMEMBER SCREAMING "NEVER AGAIN!"
THIS IS A TIME OF GREAT PORTENT...
...FOR THE BARRIERS SEPARATING DREAMS AND REALITY ARE FALLING.
DREAMS ARE COMING TRUE, CHARLES SMITH.
YOU DREAMED OF THE POWER TO WAR AGAINST DEATH ITSELF-- AND YOUR DREAM IS REALITY!
WOW. REALLY?
YES. INDEED.
FOR MY PART, I NEVER WANTED POWER. I WAS ONCE A PRINCE OF DREAMS, UNTIL FATE CHOSE ME FOR MY ROLE.
I AM BECOME DEATH, CHARLES SMITH. I AM DEATH ITSELF.
WE MUST WAR, CHARLES SMITH. AND I MUST DESTROY YOU.
MAKE YOURSELF READY FOR RITUAL COMBAT... TO THE DEATH. WHEN YOU HAVE PREPARED YOURSELF...
I WILL COME AGAIN FOR YOU.
WOW.


A SHORT, ANXIOUS TIME LATER...
"HELLO, OFFICER? SOME INDIAN-TYPE GUY JUST DROPPED IN, THREATENING TO END THE WORLD!"
WHO'M I KIDDING? IT SOUNDS LIKE "DANCES WITH WOLVES" MEETS "PREDATOR"!
I WANTED A REASON FOR HAVING THIS BODY... WHAT I CAN DO WITH IT... BUT I DON'T KNOW THAT FIGHTING THIS GUY IS IT!
YOU CAN TAKE HIM, CHARLES... I KNOW IT! 'SIDES, WHAT'RE YOU SUPPOSED TO DO WITH THOSE BICEPS? RESCUE CATS?
WE GET A LOT OF NON-VIOLENCE TYPES IN THE SHOP...
...THEY'D TELL YOU TO TRY AND TALK HIM DOWN BEFORE GIVING IN TO THE MACHO B.S.!
BUT HE'S NOT VIOLENT! IN HIS OWN MIND, HE'S JUST BEING RATIONAL... AND COMMITTED!
SHOULD BE COMMITTED!
WELL, WHAT I WANNA KNOW IS...
...WHAT RIGHT THIS "DANCER'S" GOT TO SAY WHO GETS TO HAVE THEIR DREAMS COME TRUE AND WHO DOESN'T?
DIDN'T YOU HAVE A DREAM TO FIND YOUR BROTHER, CHARLES? I MEAN, I KNOW THINGS WENT BAD, BUT...
BUT I HAD THAT! IT WAS MINE, AND IF I BELIEVED IN IT HARD ENOUGH, IT'D HAPPEN!
AND IT DID... EVEN IF IT WAS ONLY FOR A LITTLE BIT...
EVERYONE DESERVES A SHOT AT THEIR DREAM...
...AND PROTECTING THAT RIGHT'S ALL THE REASON I NEED!
YOU HAVE ACCEPTED MY OFFER OF RITUAL COMBAT?

I WELCOME YOU TO THE DANCE, WARRIOR!
WHERE--?! HEY, THIS IS YELLOWSTONE!
IT IS A FITTING SITE! THE LANDSCAPE PROVIDES A POWERFUL SYMBOL OF A WORLD BROUGHT BACK TO ITS PRIMAL STATE!
YOUR SPIRIT IS SPRY! YOU MAY STRIKE THE FIRST BLOW!
THE "NATURAL WONDERS" STORE AT THE SANTA MONICA GALLERIA DIDN'T CUT IT FOR YOU, HUH?
REMIND ME TO THANK YOU--
HRYAAAK!
--IF THERE'S ANYTHING LEFT AFTER I'M THROUGH!


COME ON!
YOU HAVE CHOSEN COMBAT ON THE PHYSICAL LEVEL...
...I WILL ADJUST MY STYLE TO MATCH YOURS!
HOW'D--?
"PHYSICAL COMBAT"? WHAT OTHER KIND IS--?
THE CHOICE IS MADE, WARRIOR. THE TIME FOR QUESTIONS IS PAST.
THIS IS NO LONGER A LESSON...
...IT IS A CLEANSING!


YOUR SKILL FALLS SHORT OF YOUR POTENTIAL.
GUESS YOU'RE RIGHT ON THAT, DANCER...
...BUT I MAKE UP FOR IT IN BACKBONE!
TENACITY IS A POOR SUBSTITUTE FOR THE ELEGANCE OF A BATTLE SEQUENCE!
THIS DANCE MUST END ONE WAY ONLY! THIS "REALITY" CAN NOT BE ALLOWED A CHAMPION SUCH AS YOURSELF!
I CAN NOT OFFER YOU MY HAND, WARRIOR...


I GOT NEWS FOR YOU, DANCER...
...I WOULDN'T TAKE IT.!
YOU ACT SO NOBLE--BUT WHAT'S REALLY BEHIND THAT? YOU'VE GOT SOMETHING INCREDIBLE--
--AND YOU'RE TWISTED UP INSIDE OVER ANYONE ELSE GETTING A TASTE!
MAYBE IT WOULD BE LIKE YOU SAID-- MAYBE IT'S ALL GOING TO GO DOWN THE TUBES--
--BUT WE DESERVE THE CHANCE TO MAKE OUR OWN CHOICES AND FIND OUR OWN WAY!
NOT HAVE IT HANDED TO US! NOT BE DICTATED TO!

DREAMS ARE ALL SOME OF US IN THIS REALITY HAVE! AND YOU OR ANYBODY ELSE ISN'T GOING TO TAKE THEM FROM US!

NO!

YOUR IDEALS ARE TRUE, CHARLES.

BUT THIS IS NO PHILOSOPHER'S DEBATE! NO ENTERTAINING INTELLECTUAL DIALOGUE!

I HAVE TRAVELLED THE INNER WORKINGS OF THE UNIVERSE--

--I HAVE BEEN ONE WITH THE MECHANICS OF THE COSMOS--

--AND I TELL YOU THAT THIS INTERCOURSE OF DREAM AND REALITY IS A DEADLY THING!

THE FASTER THE BOULDERS SMASH DOWN--
--THE HARDER CHARLES SMITH STRIKES OUT--
--BECAUSE THAT'S THE NATURE OF THIS YOUNG MAN.
AND WHEN HE FINALLY FALLS, IT IS BECAUSE THE BODY--
--EVEN ONE SINGULAR AS HIS--
--WILL EVENTUALLY GIVE OUT.

BUT NOT THE RESOLVE.

YOU FIGHT WELL, CHARLES SMITH, BUT YOUR LACK OF EXPERIENCE HAS PROVED YOUR *RUIN!*

NOW I MUST MAKE GOOD ON MY PROMISE... AND MY *THREAT!* REMAIN STILL AND I WILL BE SWIFT WITH--

--WHAT?

NEVER THE RESOLVE.

NOT S-STOPPING--

--NOT UNTIL YOU'RE *DOWN*--

KRAK

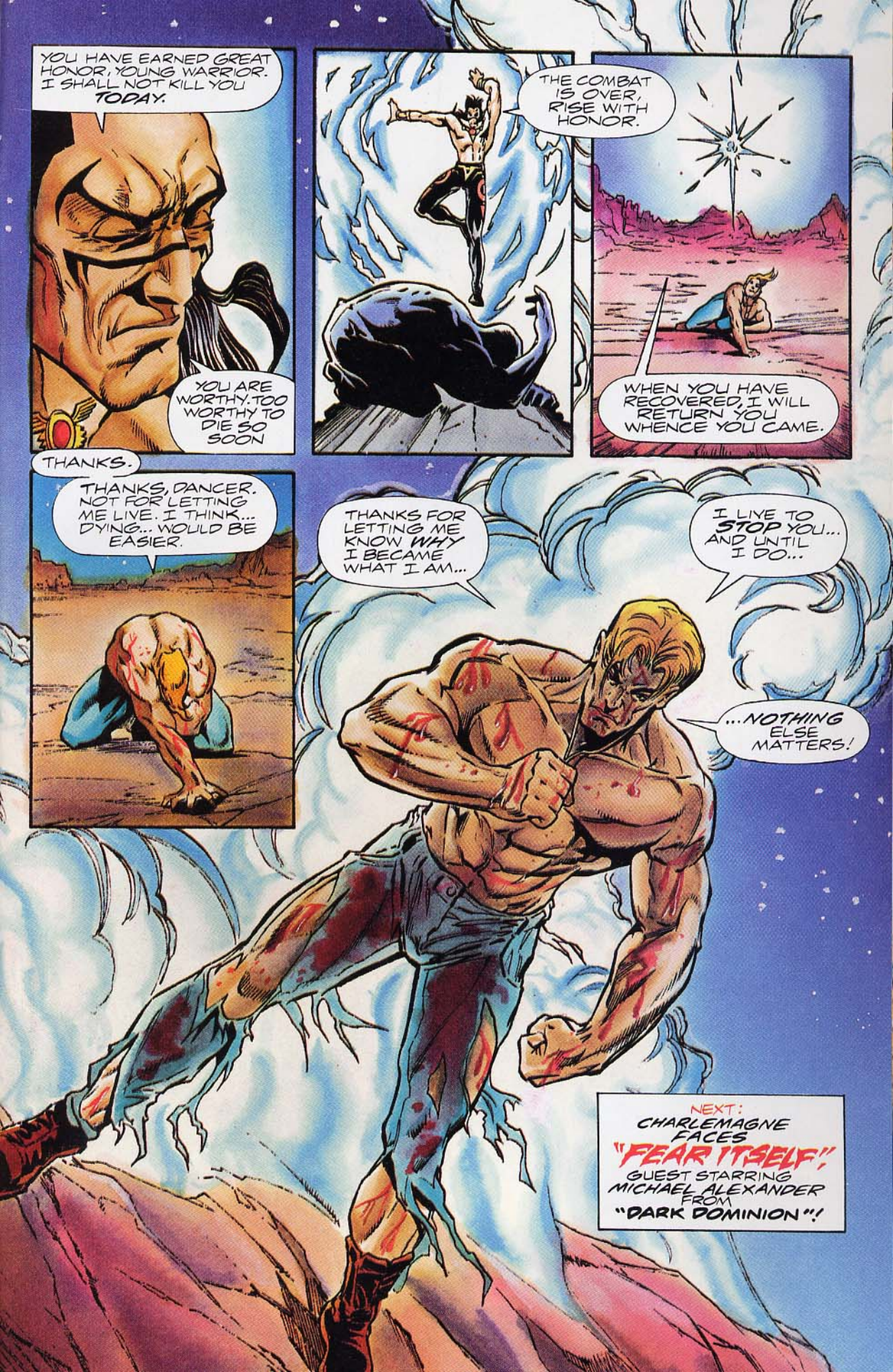
THE DANCER WOULD BE LYING IF HE SAID HE DIDN'T **FEEL** THE BLOW.

INCREDIBLY. PAINFULLY.

IT'S NOT A FEELING THE WARRIOR LIKES.

THAT TOOK *ALL* YOU HAD, HUMAN...

...AND FOR THE MOMENT, IT'S ALL YOU *NEED.*


YOU HAVE EARNED GREAT HONOR, YOUNG WARRIOR. I SHALL NOT KILL YOU TODAY.
YOU ARE WORTHY. TOO WORTHY TO DIE SO SOON
THE COMBAT IS OVER, RISE WITH HONOR.
WHEN YOU HAVE RECOVERED, I WILL RETURN YOU WHENCE YOU CAME.
THANKS.
THANKS, DANCER. NOT FOR LETTING ME LIVE. I THINK... DYING... WOULD BE EASIER.
THANKS FOR LETTING ME KNOW WHY I BECAME WHAT I AM...
I LIVE TO STOP YOU... AND UNTIL I DO...
...NOTHING ELSE MATTERS!
NEXT: CHARLEMAGNE FACES "FEAR ITSELF", GUEST STARRING MICHAEL ALEXANDER FROM "DARK DOMINION"!